

By STUART EARP Tilbury 2, Wycombe Wanderers 3

HOW do you dominate a game, score three goals and then almost throw two points away? Wycombe Wanderers found out on Saturday when they visited Tilbury in the Isthmian League Premier Division.

The answer is really quite simple. If you don't take your chances the other side is always in with a shout and this proved to be exactly the case.

Wycombe had built up a commanding 2-1 lead at half-time and then for 25 minutes of the second half they tore the home side to ribbons with a breathtaking performance that was easily the best they have produced this season. It was brilliant stuff — superb passing, inventive running, football of the highest class at any level.

But when it came to goals, only one chance was taken from at least half a dozen scoring opportunities. Without exaggeration, Wanderers would have been approaching double figures if those chances had been put away but they weren't and the inevitable happened.

Tilbury broke away, scored from a corner and were right back in a game that looked far beyond the reach. The situation was transformed. Wycombe, so calm before, were now almost reduced to panic stations as Tilbury threw everything they had forward. Only a fine save from Peter Spittle and some desperate clearances from Keith Mead and Paul Birdseye kept Wycombe in front.

The final whistle must have sounded far sweeter than usual to the Blues and yet it would have been one of the most shocking travesties of all time if Tilbury had snatched a draw — or even victory.

For the supporters who made the 60-odd mile journey to dockland, it was certainly worthwhile even though few of them have any fingernails left by now!

It is difficult to single out players from what was for the most part, an excellent team performance but when things were going well, the midfield trio of Graham Mackenzie, Howard Kennedy and Farouk Quraishi were in great form. 'Jock' had a particularly good game, capped by a fine goal while the front

runners also looked dangerous. But in the end, the back four deserve as much credit for holding out. Birdseye, I felt, was quite superb on occasions while the ever reliable Mead saved the Blues' bacon on more than one occasion.

The team that beat Staines 4-0 needed only eight minutes to open their account on Saturday. Dylan Evans and Derek Harris were both involved and as the ball came out wide, Mackenzie measured a first time shot past goalkeeper Tony Armstrong from 15 yards.

Within two minutes, however, Tilbury were on level terms. Alan Phillips headed out a cross to Colin Wallace, who did well to hook in a shot as the ball bounced high. Spittle was struggling to get across when the ball hit the base of an upright and the veteran Kenny Gray, holder of many England amateurs caps, showed just how to snap up a half chance by planting the ball home.

A double save by Armstrong from Harris deprived Wanderers in the 16th minute and then an Evans cross bounced on top of the crossbar and went over. After 20 minutes the woodwork robbed Wycombe again as Harris controlled Evans' cross brilliantly at the near post but then saw his shot strike an upright.

The pressure was rewarded in the 39th minute, however, when Wanderers went two up through an own goal. Dave Barnett was beaten by Evans who did well to get over a cross from the byeline. Tilbury's defence was facing goalwards and as the ball came over, Malcolm Dinton stuck out a leg and saw the ball sail firmly into his own net.

When Wycombe started the second half with a marvellous move out of defence, incorporating six first time passes, they looked ready to sew the match up then and there. Those thoughts were confirmed when Mick Holifield put them 3-1 ahead after only two minutes of the half. Evans' through ball caught Tilbury's defence square and Holifield ran on to place his shot wide of Armstrong, who was slow to react to the danger.

For the next 20 minutes, Wycombe flowed forward at top speed and gave the home defence a fearful hammering. The chances came thick and fast. Mackenzie headed straight at the 'keeper, Evans was high and wide with two more chances while in Tilbury's only attack of the first quarter, Mead cleared Neil Partner's cross off the line.

The action soon returned to the other end with Kennedy cracking a volley towards the net and Armstrong parrying. Mackenzie's follow-up was blocked on the line.

It seemed Tilbury must crack again as Wanderers piled on further pressure with the midfield men supporting superbly. But from Tilbury's first corner of the half, in the 68th minute, they pulled the score back to 3-2. Alan Dennis was poorly marked and made the most of the space to head home from no more than five yards.

The game was transformed immediately. There was nothing clever about Tilbury's tactics, high up-and-downers in a bid to panic the Blues defence. It almost paid off.

Even so, the chances were still being missed when Wanderers broke away. Quraishi saw Armstrong pull off the best save of the match to tip his 25 yard drive over while Evans spurned another difficult chance made by Harris and Holifield.

Tilbury, however, must have sensed that Wanderers would not score again and kept up their bombardment of high balls. The powerful Mick Clarke almost got through the entire defence only to see Birdseye block the shot while Spittle did well to gather Gerry Sullivan's shot.

It was a tremendous finish and capped a great game during which neither trainer was on the field throughout the 90 minutes.

TILBURY: A. Armstrong; N. Partner, D. Barnett, M. Linton, E. Marjoram; C. Wallace (sub P. Hammond 69 mins), A. Dennis, M. Clarke, G. Sullivan; K. Gray, N. Smith.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, S. Vass; G. Mackenzie, H. Kennedy, F. Quraishi; D. Evans, D. Harris, M. Holifield. Sub A. Horseman (not used).

Referee: C. Downey (Isleworth).
Half-time: 1-2. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Mackenzie (8), Linton o.g. (39), Holifield (47). Tilbury — Gray (10), Dennis (68).

CALL UP

TWO Wycombe Wanderers, Alan Phillips and Howard Kennedy, have been called up to play for the F.A. XI against Oxford University at Oxford United F.C. tomorrow (Wednesday).

There were no fewer than five withdrawals from the original squad and the inclusion of Phillips and Kennedy means that Wycombe now have three representatives in the side. Left back Steve Vass is the other player.

Tonight (Tuesday), Paul Birdseye turns out for the Rest of the League XI against champions Enfield at Southbury Road.

Chesham game off

WYCOMBE Wanderers proposed match at Chesham tonight (Tuesday) has been postponed. The Blues were due to travel to the Meadow for a Shaw and Kilburn League fixture but as United have an Isthmian League game tomorrow (Wednesday), they decided to call the game off.

No other match has been arranged and so Wycombe's next game is at home to Leytonstone in the Isthmian League on Saturday.

Programmes

WYCOMBE Wanderers Supporters Club are staging the first Programme Fair to be held at Loakes Park on Sunday November 20 in the clubhouse. The doors open at 11 a.m. and the bar will be open.

Blues to keep same side?

AFTER two exciting victories over Staines and Tilbury, Wycombe Wanderers will be hoping to cut back on leaders Enfield tomorrow (Saturday) when they meet Leytonstone at Loakes Park.

Enfield currently lead the table by four points from the Blues but the Middlesex club have two games in hand. Enfield are involved in the F.A. Cup tomorrow.

Wycombe have only one injury problem in Tony Horseman,

who has a groin strain. Even so, manager John Reardon is likely to retain the side that has produced some of Wycombe's best football so far this season in their last two games.

Leytonstone have a much changed side this season with only a couple of last year's players remaining, among them

veteran full back Les Tilley. They are currently languishing near the foot of the table but recent results suggest they will prove a stubborn obstacle for Wanderers.

Despite their low placing they have held three leading clubs — Enfield, Leatherhead and Tooting — to goalless draws this season while they have only lost to both Hayes and Walthamstow recently by the odd goal.

The Stones are likely to be without the transfer listed Steve King, for whom they want £7,000, and manager Tony Mackie is relying on youth to steer them up the table.